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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN DEPUTY FM TRUBNIKOV ON MOLDOVA

Classified By: Political Counselor Mary E. Daly for reasons 1.5 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: At a September 30 bilateral meeting in The Hague, Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Trubnikov told EUR/SNEC Ambassador Perina that he would soon be calling the Deputy Secretary with specific ideas on how the U.S. and Russia can cooperate on Moldova. Trubnikov claimed that he and the Russian MFA were doing everything possible to move forward the Transnistria status negotiations and the withdrawal of weapons under the Istanbul Commitments. Certain other individuals and ministries were hampering the effort, however. Nonetheless, Putin had the right intentions, Smirnov had been called to Moscow to be "seriously pressured," and even the weapons withdrawal could be finished largely on time if the Transnistrians allow two loading areas--Colbasna and Tiraspol. Trubnikov also agreed with the Dutch to start expert-level talks on a Russian-EU peacekeeping force. End Summary.

12. (C) Perina began by telling Trubnikov that the U.S. was concerned and puzzled by Russian actions. We wanted Moldova to be an example of successful U.S.-Russian-EU cooperation in solving a regional conflict, but Russian actions put us at cross-purposes. The arms withdrawal had stopped, and the Deputy Head of Putin's Presidential Administration--Dmitri Kozak--seemed to be working unilaterally in the region. This could lead to real problems for all of us at the Maastricht OSCE Ministerial.

13. (C) Trubnikov said he was aware of U.S. concerns and suspicions. But we should know that Kozak was dispatched by Putin at Voronin's request, and without his (Trubnikov's) knowledge or advice. Kozak was an expert constitutional lawyer who was trying to give Voronin what he wants in a legal document. But the political job of persuading Smirnov to accept such a document could not be done by Kozak, nor was Kozak negotiating any security guarantees.

14. (C) Trubnikov said that putting pressure on Smirnov was still a problem. He (Trubnikov) and the MFA were doing everything possible to exert such pressure, but certain other individuals and ministries were hampering their efforts. Some people had "material interests" in Transnistria, and others saw it as an outpost of continued Russian influence. This was all silly because Russia would always have influence in Moldova, but it afforded Smirnov protection. Trubnikov admitted that Russia had "a lot" of compromising information about Smirnov and his family, but it was held by other ministries and not in the hands of the MFA.

15. (C) Nonetheless, Putin wanted to help Voronin. Smirnov was currently being summoned to Moscow to be "seriously pressured" on both the political talks and the arms withdrawal. Trubnikov predicted that there would be an agreed political document before the end of the year. Even the arms withdrawal could come near completion if Smirnov allowed two loading and dispatch points--Colbasna and Tiraspol. Trubnikov said he realized that arms withdrawal had to be back on track before the Maastricht Ministerial and predicted that it would be.

16. (C) When asked where this left the security guarantees, Trubnikov admitted that some in Moscow would like to see a permanent Russian military presence in Moldova. However, the MFA understood that this would cause big political problems for Voronin and diplomatic problems for Russia. A multilateral force and mandate would have to be negotiated at the right time. Trubnikov avoided further comment on this subject.

17. (C) Perina stressed that the U.S. wanted to work with Russia to ensure that Moldova becomes a joint success and not a source of recrimination and suspicion. He asked Trubnikov how the U.S. could help to produce such positive outcomes.

18. (C) After a pause, Trubnikov said he had been thinking about the same thing since his telephone conversation the previous week with Deputy Secretary Armitage. He wanted to give it more thought and see how the Moscow meetings with Smirnov progress. He promised to call the Deputy Secretary soon, however, with some specific ideas on how the U.S. and Russia could cooperate constructively on Moldova.

19. (C) Following the meeting, Ambassador Perina compared notes with Dutch OSCE coordinator Daan Everts, who had also met with Trubnikov. Trubnikov's comments at both meetings were similar. However, Everts added that Trubnikov agreed to the start of expert-level talks with the Dutch on a possible Russian-EU peacekeeping force in Moldova. Everts said he would issue formal invitations for the Russians to come to The Hague in a week or two.

110. (C) Comment: Everts was elated after his meeting with Trubnikov, believing that some agreements on Moldova might still be achieved in time for the Maastricht Ministerial. Trubnikov has failed to deliver on Moldova before, however, and appeared particularly resentful of Voronin's request to bring someone new like Kozak into the process. Still, Trubnikov appeared sensitive to the problems that could result from unilateral Russian actions in Moldova and sincere in his wish to avoid them in any Transnistria settlement. Continued U.S. and EU pressure on the Russians will be necessary to keep open any chance of positive results on Moldova in time for Maastricht.

111. (U) Ambassador Perina has cleared on this cable and provided the above comment.
SOBEL